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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001513

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR SOCI ECON KS KN JN IR
SUBJECT: SENIOR ROK DIPLOMAT ON IRAN, DPRK HUMANITARIAN AID

REF: SEOUL 1503

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Young-joon told the DCM on 9/21 that while the ROK would be as helpful as possible on Iran issues in the coming weeks, Seoul's position would be shaped by what Tokyo does. Lee argued the ROKG position on humanitarian assistance to North Korea is clear and consistent: no ROK-registered NGO is currently permitted to ship high-tech medical equipment to the DPRK. The reason, he explained, is that there is "zero possibility" such equipment would be used on ordinary, non-elite North Koreans. The DFM dismissed the notion that the upcoming family reunions, the first in two years, will generate public pressure on the Blue House to take a more conciliatory line on humanitarian assistance. End summary.

Iran: Watching What Japan Does

¶2. (C) During a September 21 lunch hosted by the DCM, ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Young-joon said Seoul would be as helpful as possible on Iran issues in the coming weeks but would be watching what Tokyo does. If, for example, Japan's delegation walked out of Iranian or Libyan UNGA speeches that cross U.S. redlines (reftel), the ROK delegation probably would as well. Lee, who supervises the Middle East Bureau as well as the North America Bureau, candidly cautioned that Washington should not expect Seoul to do more on Iran than Japan. The Japanese are in the midst of a robust expansion of economic, political and cultural ties with Iran, he claimed, and the South Korean business community is lobbying the Blue House hard, claiming ROK companies are falling behind the Japanese in the race to secure major Iranian government contracts. Lee asserted that the ROK business community is quietly but persistently urging the Blue House to follow Tokyo's -- not Washington's -- lead.

DPRK: Low-Tech Medical Supplies Good, High-Tech Gear Bad

¶3. (SBU) Turning to the issue of humanitarian assistance for North Korea, Lee argued that the ROKG stance is clear and consistent: no ROK-registered NGO is being permitted to ship high-tech medical equipment to the DPRK. There are no exceptions. He explained that the reason such equipment (including ultrasonic) is not being sent to North Korea is that there is "zero possibility" the equipment would be used on non-elites. Lee scoffed at the notion that even such ordinary equipment as sonograms would be used for regular people, saying that, if sent, such gear would be portrayed as "tribute" to KJI and used at a Pyongyang hospital that treats

KWP and military/security force elites.

¶4. (SBU) Lee acknowledged the DCM's point that the definition of "humanitarian assistance" is subjective and open to different interpretations. The ROKG view is that, for example, 50,000 tons of rice to help feed starving people constitutes humanitarian assistance; 500,000 tons represents "something completely different." Similarly, costly medical equipment to treat regime cronies cannot be characterized as humanitarian assistance, he argued. Low-tech medical assistance, specifically more "aspirin, rubbing alcohol and morphine," would meet the ROK standard and DPRK needs.

North-South: Reunions Will Fizzle

¶5. (C) The DFM dismissed the suggestion that upcoming reunions of family members separated during the Korean War, the first in two years, will generate public pressure on the Blue House to take a more conciliatory line on humanitarian assistance to the north. He predicted that the South Korean public, focused on the Chusok holiday, will react in a ho-hum way to the televised scenes of tearful relatives embracing at the Mount Kumgang resort. Lee characterized the reunions as practically meaningless, as the elderly family members spend only a few hours together and Pyongyang monitors what the DPRK participants tell their southern kin. The DFM said that if the North Koreans were truly serious about family reunions, they would let them happen in Seoul and Pyongyang -- not just within the Mt. Kumgang bubble.

STEPHEN